

DREAMS from R'LYEH

Lin Carter



Introduction by L. Sprague De Camp

of
LIN CARTER
and
DREAMS FROM
R'LYEH

Lin Carter (1930-) has, in less than ten years, made his name a respected and internationally familiar one to readers and collectors of weird fantasy around the world. Today he is considered an authority on the history of imaginative literature, and his pioneering book-length studies of the genre are modern classics of fantasy scholarship. His first venture in this area was *Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings,"* which has sold steadily through four large printings and elicited the admiration of W. H. Auden, among others. This was followed by an even more impressive work of scholarly research, and one of deeper interest to Arkham House patrons, *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the "Cthulhu Mythos,"* the first booklength study of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, which Fritz Leiber hailed as "the best single book or article I have ever read dealing with Howard Phillips Lovecraft, his life, his works, the Cthulhu Mythos, and the many writers who contributed to it."

As editor of the prestigious Adult Fantasy Series for the paperback firm of Ballantine Books, Mr. Carter has been directly responsible for reviving an entire literature—scores of fantasy and macabre classics by such neglected giants of yesterday as William Morris, Lord Dunsany, William Hope Hodgson, Arthur Machen, James Branch Cabell and Clark Ashton Smith—many of which had been out of print for a half-century or more and none of whom had ever appeared in popular mass-market paperbacks. For his work "Under the Sign of the Unicorn's Head," alone, Lin Carter has already earned the enthusiastic gratitude of the world's fantasy

Continued on back flap



DREAMS FROM R'LYEH

by

LIN CARTER

With an Introduction by
L. Sprague de Camp



ARKHAM HOUSE Sauk City, Wisconsin

1975

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TO

H. P. Lovecraft, Gent.,
lately of His Majestie's Collony of
Rhode-Island & the Providence-Plantations,
but now (I trust) residing in the
sunset city of his dreams.

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MERLIN ON THE QUEENS EXPRESS

My friend and collaborator Lin Carter and I sometimes argue about poetry. He comes out strong for free-form verse, now almost the only kind seen in scholarly and literary periodicals. Most of it, to my way of thinking, makes Eddie Guest look good. Having had my indoctrination in these matters a couple of decades earlier than Lin, I persist in preferring the currently unfashionable fixed-form verse. He says:

“According to Pound, all those limitations of rhyme and metre just get in the way. Throw ’em out!”

“Pound!” snort I. “Just a nutty old solipsist showing off his erudition. You don’t make turgid prose into poetry by chopping it into arbitrary short lines of a few words each —”

“You just haven’t been with it, man. All those formalities are just crutches to shore up lines that should be strong enough to stand without them.”

“Well, since I’m not Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson, I need those crutches —”

And so on. By the time we settle the argument, perhaps each of us will have brought the other around to his original point of view. Or perhaps another lurch in public taste will have made both our viewpoints obsolete.

But I am happy to see that here, Lin presents a sheaf of fixed-form poems in traditional style. All, that is, but *Merlin Enchanted*, which he describes as the only “real poem” of the lot. *Merlin Enchanted*, however, is not so *libre a vers* as those words imply. It is a perfectly respectable series of blank-verse septets in iambic pentameter, with a few irregularities and an intricate system of repetitive lines. And the other poems are just as “real” as this one.

This brings up the question: What are poems for? Lin writes me: “No one, least of all myself, is going to take these verses seriously. They were written in a sense of fun, the shivery relish of Lovecraftian ghoulishness and Klarkash-Tonian hyperbole.” He refers to the stories and poems of the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937), the noted writer of eldritch-horror neo-Gothic fantasies and creator of the “Cthulhu mythos”; and Lovecraft’s Californian colleague and pen pal, Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961), author of tales laid in the magic-haunted continents of Hyperborea, Atlantis, and Zothique. (In his correspondence with Smith, Lovecraft spelled his friend’s name Klarkash-Ton, thus converting a pair of prosaically Anglo-Saxon nomina into something from the slimy depths of R’lyeh.)

Well, why shouldn’t one write poetry for fun, to amuse and entertain the reader? Once the tribal bard kept track of the pedigrees of the clans, did public-relations duty for the chief by composing lays about his heroic deeds, and sang the tribesmen into battle. But time has whittled away these functions of the poet. Nowadays, if he does not amuse and entertain, the poet might as well keep his verses to himself for all the attention that will be paid him.

Nobody is going to solve such ancient and intractable problems as war and peace, the production and distribution of wealth, and the relations between the sexes by writing poems about them —

least of all poems that sound as if composed by a computer — although some contemporary poets seem to think they ought to try. So let's have some poems that are fun to read. That means poems that say their say in intelligible English and that exploit, rather than are constrained by, the devices of fixed forms to strengthen their impact. As, for instance, the present collection.

Dreams from R'lyeh, which comprise two thirds of this volume, is a cycle of sonnets about the legend-haunted New England invented by Lovecraft. In Lovecraft's fictional cosmogony, a race of benign deities, the Elder Gods, once banished or restrained a hostile race of supernatural beings, the Great Old Ones or Ancient Ones. Ignorant mortals, however, now and then tamper with the restraints upon the Ancient Ones, who thereupon manifest themselves in terrifying fashion. These include Nyarlathotep, the messenger of the other Ancient Ones; the squid-headed Cthulhu, who sleeps in R'lyeh at the bottom of the sea; and Shub-Niggurath, the Goat with a Thousand Young, a Lovecraftian version of Pan.

Many of these stories were laid on Lovecraft's own part of New England, "Arkham" being a thinly-disguised version of Salem. Lin Carter's sonnets, which use the Lovecraftian cosmos as a springboard, do something rarely attempted with this form. Taken together, they tell a story: the seduction of a scholarly youth of an old Arkham family by the malignant study of the treacherous tomes of eldritch lore invented by Lovecraft, and the scholar's dissolution into a mindless wraith wafting through the outer dark.

The other poems deal with various fantastic subjects. Now, imaginative prose and poesy have suffered during the last few decades from the competition of reality. Nobody will ever again be able to write a story, as did H. G. Wells, with the title: *The First Men in the Moon*. The sinister spells of the wickedest

wizards seem tame alongside Buchenwald, Hiroshima, and Vorkuta. So, rightly to enjoy imaginative compositions takes a certain mental attitude. This is not merely the well-known "suspension of disbelief." It is the ability to become again, if not "as a little child," at least as a big child or an adolescent.

This is not so hard as one might think. Psychologists tell us that each of us has, bottled up inside him, the child from whom he grew — the same child that feared the dark, believed in Santa Claus, and had reveries wherein wonderful adventures took place. Those who can evoke this suppressed young person within them can derive from fantastic writings, of the type of Lovecraft and Carter, an intensity of terror, triumph, and kindred emotions seldom matched in the workaday world.

Carter the man is of medium height and slight build, in his late thirties, with blue eyes and auburn hair and beard. Born and reared in Florida, he served a hitch in the U.S. Army in Korea. (When the present crop of young scream about the inhuman hardships of military service, he shrugs and says: "Well, it didn't hurt *me* any.")

Later, he studied literature at Columbia University, wrote copy for an advertising agency, and became a full-time free-lance writer, specializing in science fiction and fantasy. He has sold sixty or seventy books, including children's fairy tales and a scholarly study of J. R. R. Tolkien's "Ring" trilogy, published as *Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings."* He has collaborated with the late Robert E. Howard and with me in rounding out Howard's fictional saga of Conan the Cimmerian.

He lives with his wife Noël in Hollis, in the Borough of Queens, New York City. He has a three-story house full of dogs and of antiques, curios, swords, art objects, and other collectanea. A confirmed night owl, he rattles away nightly on his typewriter, casting his own version of Merlin's nocturnal spells.

For Lin's main strength as a writer, both of prose and of verse, lies in the most important quality of a fictioneer: being a natural storyteller. A writer of fiction who cannot tell a tale so as to hold the reader's interest is like a boat that, though it have the world's shiniest brass, will not float. Lin has been casting his Merlinian spells for quite some years now and shows every sign of casting many more in times to come.

— L. Sprague de Camp

DREAMS FROM R'LYEH

DREAMS FROM R'LYEH:

A SONNET CYCLE

By Wilbur Nathaniel Hoag [1921-1944]

Edited for Publication by Lin Carter

"Eternal is the Pow'r of Evil, and Infinite in its contagion! The Great Cthulhu yet hath sway o'er the minds and spirits of Men, yea, even tho' He lieth chained and ensorcelled, bound in the fetters of The Elder Sign, His malignant and loathly Mind spreadeth the dark seeds of Madness and Corruption into the dreams and Nightmares of sleeping men . . ."

—*The Necronomicon* of Abdul Alhazred, III, 17; the Translation of Dr. John Dee, *circa* A.D. 1585.

". . . Death is no deterrent to the mighty dead. Even in decay their vast intellects can fill our sleeping minds with nightmare visions of the Pit and ultimate insanities beyond the reach of reason."

—*Necrolatry* (The Worship of the Dead), Ivor Gorstadt; Leipzig, 1702.

"Alhazred's image of the Sleeping God leads one almost to the interpretation of Cthulhu as one of the dream-gods such as Hypnos; he is set forth as a god who infects the minds of those asleep with dark and terrifying dreams, nightmares, visions—spreading the germs of his own evil through the world through the medium of his own dreams."

—*Cthulhu in 'The Neconomicon,'* Laban Shrewsbury, Ph.D., LL.D., etc.; from an unpublished, fragmentary manuscript written *circa* 1938-39.

Editor's Note

Dr. Milton Avery Barnes, senior curator of the Manuscripts Collection of Miskatonic University in Arkham, Mass., has asked me to edit for publication the following verses which were discovered among the papers of the gifted young poet, Wilbur Nathaniel Hoag. Nearly thirty years have elapsed since the discovery of these poems, which are now published here in their final and corrected form for the first time.

The disappearance of Mr. Hoag from his ancient family home on State Street occurred during the night of September 13, 1944, and is still an unsolved mystery. He has since been declared legally dead by the County Court, however, and as he died intestate, leaving no clearly defined heirs, the State of Massachusetts has formally bequeathed his papers and his library to the University, on whose behalf my editorial labors have been performed.

The Hoag family was established in the old seaport-town of Arkham in 1693, when Isaiah Hoag, his wife and eldest son, settled there from Plymouth, England. The family fortunes were built on the South Seas trading voyages of Isaiah's son, the famous "Yankee trader" Captain Abner Ezekiel Hoag who pioneered the rum and copra trade in the Pacific. Folklorists, anthropologists and occult scholars may, however, know Captain Hoag best for his reputed discovery of the obscure and debatable *Ponape Scripture* in the Carolines *circa* 1734, which manuscript currently is in the possession of the Kester Library in Salem, Mass., and concerning which the late archaeologist Harold Hadley Copeland published his shocking and controversial book *The Prehistoric Pacific in the Light of the 'Ponape Scripture'* (1911).

For well over two centuries, the Hoags have been prominent in Massachusetts history. Their connections with the great Marsh family have been the subject of considerable genealogical research (it was, in fact, this same Abner Ezekiel Hoag who wed Bathsheba Randall Marsh in 1713, and thus became the son-in-law of the famous Captain Obed Marsh, whose exploits as a merchant skipper are part of local Arkham legend). Still later, about 1780, the Hoag family also intermarried with the old Kingsport line founded by Amos Tuttle in 1604; the house of Hoag may, then, most fittingly be set among the ancient patriarchal families of Colonial New England and in the light of their distinguished history it is exceedingly regrettable that the old line has become extinct at last.

Our poet, Wilbur Nathaniel Hoag, was of course the last of his line, and with his death or disappearance yet one more living link with the Colonial past of our country has ended. He was only a youth of twenty-three when he vanished so mysteriously, and in all the years since that time the facts of his disappearance have never been adequately explained, nor have the circumstances surrounding his death, or presumed death, ever come to light. Official queries at the time elicited from his neighbors that for some months before he vanished into the unknown, Hoag had become a virtual recluse and was seldom if ever seen, and then only during the hours of darkness. The morbid strain evident in his verses, the continual references to death and madness, the profusion of occult themes borrowed from obscure, unwholesome mythological texts, indicate an unstable intellect bordering perhaps on severe abberance. This is a question for the psychologist, however, and our principal concern here is purely a literary one.

In preparing these sonnets for publication, I have imposed upon them an order and sequence not indicated in the original manuscript. I have been aided by the rapid degeneracy of Hoag's

handwriting. What I assume to be the earlier verses, those relating to his childhood, are written in a clear and classic Spencerian hand; rapidly, however, this clarity decays to a hurried scribble, and, in the latter half of the sonnets, the penmanship has become an almost animal scrawl, the pages splotted and stained by the oddest pus or slime. Indeed, the latter verses are all but illegible, and, so uncouth is their ragged scrawl, that I have almost fancied them indited on the page by the deformed paw of some hybrid beast, than by the scion of a fine old Arkham family.

The mystery of Hoag's disappearance — so oddly akin to the mystery of his late Uncle, Zorad Ethan Hoag, murdered and repugnantly mutilated by an unknown hand (our poet makes shuddering reference to the crime in the sonnet I have numbered VII) — will probably never be solved at this late date. But the dark brilliance of his macabre verse, savoring of the more poisonously beautiful pages of Baudelaire, or Poe, or the late Rhode Island poet, H. P. Lovecraft, is clearly evident in every jewelled page. Morbid these poems are, but in the phrase of H. P. Lovecraft, *Radiant with beauty, the Cup of the Ptolemies was carven of onyx.*

— Lin Carter
Miskatonic University
Arkham, Mass. 01970



I. REMEMBRANCES

I am New England born, and home to me
Is ancient Kingsport on the Harbour side.
When I was very young my Father died
And so I came to Arkham by the sea
Where Uncle Zorad and his servant, Jones,
Lived in the old house. He, my guardian,
Was a strange, silent, melancholy man
Given to dark old books and carven stones.

It was from him at last I understood
Why Kingsport people shunned our family.
"Our grandsires came in 1693,"
He said. "And even here they hate our blood.
We came from the old country to survive.
There, we were witches, to be burnt alive."

II. ARKHAM

How much I loved the city's ancient ways,
Quaint cobbled streets, fanlights above the door;
Arkham preserved a softer, gentler lore
In this day's turmoil, from lost nobler days.
I loved the crooked alleys, narrow, grey,
And gabled houses leaning all awry . . .
But even then it had begun to die;
The very air was noisome with decay.

The river-mist, rank with a rotten smell,
The crowded houses, slumped, ramshackle, thin;
Arkham was like a corpse whose outward shell
Preserved a lifelike semblance, while within
Worm, mould and maggot, in a wriggling slime
Bear witness to the leprous touch of time.

III. THE FESTIVAL

It was that month when red Aldebaran
Burned in the solstice skies arisen late,
With cryptic starry signs enconstellate,
Spelling some occult lore unguessed by man.
The shifting starlight made strange shadows flit
Among the sliding coils of mist that flowed
From the dark Miskatonic past the road.
And every night the Dagon Hall was lit.

It was a sort of church. Old malformed oaks
Grew up around it in a kind of ring.
I overheard the servant say, "The folks
Wonder, ye keep the lad from Worshipping;
Tonight is Festival." I bent to hear
My Uncle say, "He's young. Another year . . . "

IV. THE OLD WOOD

Northwards from Arkham up along the coast,
The ancient woods that climb the hills around
Grow oddly thick for such unhealthy ground.
And on the hill-tops, where they grow the most,
All seem deformed and strangely overgrown
As if their roots, deep down within the earth,
Fed on the rank putrescence of some Birth
Malformed and monstrous, and best left unknown.

Even the grass grows mouldy, and a smell
Hangs in the air as though something was dead,
While bloated fungi spread their stench as well.
I asked my Uncle's servant once. He said,
"Sure, I can tell ye"—would he had not talked!
"—That is the Wood where once the Black Goat walked."

V. THE LOCKED ATTIC

He always kept it locked, the attic room,
And ordered me to keep away from there.
I wondered why, and one day climbed the stair
And broke the lock. A place of airless gloom
With walls and rafters that leaned oddly wrong
And crazy angles that were hard to see,
As in some alien geometry
With more dimensions than to ours belong.

But nothing frightened me, until I tried
To open up the window for some air
And found it opened from *the other side*.
I wiped the dusty pane, and saw out there—
What should not be! I screamed, and somehow knew
What awful worlds that window opened to.

VI. THE SHUNNED CHURCH

"It's been abandoned quite a spell," he said,
"That old church on the hill in back o' Hunt's.
When we was kids, we thought 'twas haunted. Once
I found out why it's still untenanted . . .
One night I heard 'em talk about the place,
How it were closed on 'count of what were done
In there each Roodmass, and how there was one
Never come out, who went inside. They chased

The preacher feller out o' town, I think . . .
One night the kids dared me to go inside.
It were all dark and dusty, with a stink
All through th' air, like somethin' that had died.
—I screamed and run, soon as I understood
Whose image there on the Black Altar stood!"

VII. THE LAST RITUAL

The night he died the Demon Star was high.
It hung above the house against the dark
A cold, arcane, malign and watching spark
Like some green, burning and Cycloptic eye.
They locked me in my room, but I could see
My Uncle take down that abhorrent book
At whose mad page I was forbade to look,
Gorstadt's grim volume of Necrolatry.

I heard them chanting (they had closed the blind),
And smelled some burning reek ophidian . . .
Then all was silence . . . till the screams began.
At dawn the neighbors broke the door, to find
Jones gibbering and mad. Uncle was dead.
They found his body. All except the head.

VIII. THE LIBRARY

When I was young they never let me look
Into that room kept under lock and key,
But when he died my Uncle left to me
His strange collection. Almost every book
Was old and crumbling, curiously bound
In serpent-skin, and with a rotten smell
As of some tainted and abandoned well,
Or some dead thing long buried underground.

I looked in one. And, though my blood ran cold,
I read it, page by page. The nightwind blew
About the eaves, and when red morning rolled
Up from the east, I finished. And I knew
Those old, old books were not meant to be read
By sane men. They were better burnt instead.

IX. BLACK THIRST

The yellowed pages, rotten with decay,
Crawling with loathsome symbols, fill my brain
With wild, tumultuous visions. Were I sane
I'd rise and hurl the leprous book away . . .
Yet I read on, half thrilled, half in disgust,
Rapt with sick fascination to explore
The vile corruption of forbidden lore,
That leaves me weak and soiled with nameless lust.

I rise with dawn and scrub my shaking hands
And gulp strong brandy down, and try to pray,
And vow to burn these books . . . another day . . .
But I am like one trapped in sinking sands,
Who strayed apart far from the paths of men.
The night will come. And I will read again . . .

X. THE ELDER AGE

This lore was old before the rise of Ur,
Before the pomp of Babylon was born,
Ere golden Egypt knew her golden morn,
Or Tyre, or Nineveh, or dark Sumer.
Ere any human peoples tread the earth
The blue Pacific lapped the carved walls
Of seacoast cities whose basaltic halls
Were drowned in myth before Atlantis' birth.

Lost land, thy ancient mages read the stars
And scanned necrotic hieroglyphs on scrolls
Borne hence from nighted Yuggoth where she rolls
Far on the Rim amidst fantastic wars.
Only the *Text* bears witness to thy lore,
Sunken R'lyeh, that shall rise no more.

XI. LOST R'LYEH

Long-lost and legended, R'lyeh sleeps,
Dreaming ensorcelled ages by, the while
Slow foetid waves wash round her rotting pile
Drowned in the uttermost of ocean deeps . . .
Until the stars are right, when from that tomb
The awful Dead her primal ruins hide
Shall rise tremendous, as was prophesied.
Until that hour she sleeping bides her doom.

Wake not, dread ruin that the tides caress,
Thou weed-grown mass of thronged decaying spires,
Dim, phosphor-litten with putrescent fires—
Sleep on, thou whelmed, accurst necropolis!
Too soon shall from thy cyclopean fane,
Cthulhu wake to walk the earth again!

XII. UNKNOWN KADATH

In what remote hyperborean clime,
Under what alien-configured skies
Namelessly constellated, it doth rise
Is known to none. In the abyss of time
No eye hath seen the sable mountain rear
Her pinnacles. The place hath not been guessed
Where Kadath lifts her onyx-castled crest
Among the *shantak*-guarded deserts drear.

Only those dreamers roaming far afield
Beyond the lands we know, to them alone
Is far and fabulous Kadath revealed
And all her mysteries to them made known,
And *That* which lies deep in her inmost crypt—
The secret of the Pnakotic Manuscript.

XIII. ABDUL ALHAZRED

Only Alhazred of all mortal men
Hath seen far Yuggoth lost beyond the Rim,
And drowned R'lyeh where lies buried Him
Who Was Before And Who Shall Be Again.
The cloudy shores of fabulous Hali
On dread Carcosa where Hastur abides,
That caverned deep where Tsathoggua hides—
No wizard else hath known, save only he.

Alhazred saw . . . and from that sight returned
Out of the nightmare deeps of the Abyss.
If thou wouldst know the Elder Lore he learned
And passed down from that century to this,
Read of those horrors of the primal dawn
Recorded in *The Necronomicon*.

XIV. HYPERBOREA

Far to the north an ancient kingdom lies
In frozen lands where only glaciers rule;
Beyond the Pole, beyond Ultima Thule,
The tomb-like towers of the city rise.
This is a cursed land where none dare dwell
And Silence guards the empty altars where,
In ages gone, by spell and rite and prayer
The wizard-priests unloosed the hordes of hell.

But all the terrors of that primal year
Sleep glacier-guarded under walls of snow,
And never shall arise. And this I know.
Yet is my soul still haunted by this fear:
The thrones and empires of the world will shake
If ever . . . Hyperborea . . . awake!

XV. THE BOOK OF EIBON

In glacier-whelmed and lost Commoriom,
Aeons before Atlantis, at the Pole
Where now but black and frozen oceans roll
Their sluggish tides, and warm suns never come,
He sought the secrets of the Elder Age,
Of nightmare gods and old fantastic wars
Brought down by Tsathoggua from the stars
And chronicled on Eibon's darkling page.

Hyperborea spake his name with dread
And whispered of strange shapes and stranger light
That moved about his ebon spire one night
When thunder spoke and all the stars burned red.
Next morn it lay in ruins everywhere.
They found his Book. His body was not there . . .

XVI. TSATHOGGUA

Beneath Voormithadreth the Mount of Dread
In lost Hyperborea long ago
Before the coming of eternal snow,
The wizard followed where the *shantak* led;
Down through the gulfs of those tremendous deeps,
Caverns of nightmare, where the wholesome sun
Hath never shone since first the earth begun,
To that abyss where Tsathoggua sleeps.

Eibon alone hath seen, and come back sane
From that slime pit of madness where It lies,
The Black Abomination from the skies,
Who sleepeth now but who shall wake again.
We know the truth, we who have dared to look
Into the darkling pages of his Book . . .

XVII. BLACK ZIMBABWE

In dreams alone I tread those jungled streets
Where shattered columns, black with hoary age,
Hint of the splendour of some crumbling page
Of history now legended. The seats
Of prehistoric majesty still stand—
The monstrous walls, the cryptic minarets
—But whose the hand that raised them? Time forgets,
Mazed in the darkness of this silent land.

Only the moon remembers, ages gone,
The glittering, barbaric Wizard-Kings
Who found the Sign and made the Offerings
In the forgotten ages of earth's dawn.
The moon alone recalls that nameless crime
That wiped them from the memory of Time.

XVIII. THE RETURN

Something is wrong tonight. Far out to sea
Strange phosphorescence flickers from below.
The ocean heaves in waves uneasy, slow,
That roil and bubble . . . an old prophecy
Comes back to haunt my soul . . . the stars burn cold
In patterns oddly wrong. And now the deep
Surges, like something—stirring—in its sleep!
Is this the Night the ancient books foretold?

Iä! The seas unfold! That *Shape*—'tis true!
He rises from the city old as time! . . .
I woke . . . and knew it but a dream . . . yet knew
The blood-congealing truth of that old rhyme:
*"That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons even death may die."*

XIX. THE SABBAT

"This is the night," the sly-faced stranger leered
—He had approached me on the lonely streets—
"This is the night the Arkham coven meets!"
Before I answered he had disappeared.
At nightfall I went down the cellar steps
And through that secret door which I had found.
It led by dark ways tunnelled underground
Into a caverned abyss in the depths.

Weak with a mingled loathing and desire,
I joined the hooded throng that milled and whirled
About the standing stones, red-lit with fire
That flamed up from the bowels of the world.
One hailed me—"Azath!"—he was robed in red—
"That was your Uncle's coven-name," he said.

XX. BLACK LOTUS

The Coven-Master gave to me a phial
Of that dread opiate that is the key
To dream-gates opening upon a sea
Of acherontic vapours: mile on mile
Stretched ebon coasts untrod, wherefrom aspire
Pylons of rough-hewn stone climbing to skies
Alien-constellated, where arise
Grey mottled moons of cold and leprous fire.

My dream-self roamed the cosmic gulfs profound,
Past daemon-haunted Haddith, where in deeps
Of foul putrescence buried underground
The loathsome shoggoth hideously sleeps.
I saw—and screamed! And knew my doom of dooms,
Learning at last . . . *where* the Black Lotus blooms.

XXI. THE UNSPEAKABLE

I drank the golden mead and did those things
Of which I read within the ancient book.
The wind awoke. The elms and willows shook
Before the thunder of fantastic wings.
Down from the cosmic gulfs the monster fell,
The grim, stupendous, bat-winged Byakhee,
Come from the cloudy shores of Lake Hali,
Black-furred and iron-beaked, with eyes of Hell.

When I bestrode its back, the beast unfurled
Its vast and mighty wings. Across dark seas
Of space we flew. Amid the Hyades
We reached at last that bleak and mythic world
To men forbidden and by gods abhorred,
Carcosa, where the great Hastur is Lord.

XXII. CARCOSA

It was a scene that I had known before,
This barren, desolate, and drear expanse
Through which I wandered in a dream-like trance.
And there in somber splendor by the shore
Of dark Hali the nameless city stood:
Black domes and monolithic towers loom
Stark and gigantic in the midnight gloom
Like druid menhirs in a haunted wood.

These streets and walls I seem to half-recall,
Wandering blindly through the winding ways
Beneath a sky with strange black stars ablaze,
From some mad dream . . . or was it dream at all?
Aye, here it was I heard Cassilda sing,
Where flap the yellow tatters of The King!

XXIII. THE CANDIDATE

Down the dark street of monoliths I passed,
The shambling, faceless figure of my Guide
A voiceless thing that beckoned at my side,
And to the dreaded Gate I came at last.
Before the silent Guardian I made
The black unhallowed Sacrifice, and spoke
Names at whose sound forgotten echoes woke.
The portals gaped. I entered unafraid.

Fate, or my stars, or some accursed pride
Had brought me here. Naked, I stood alone
And took the Vow before the Elder Throne—
He *laughed*, and drew His tattered mantle wide—
O do not seek to learn nor ever ask
What horror hides behind . . . *The Pallid Mask!*

XXIV. THE DREAM-DAEMON

In dreams the Daemon comes upon the hour
Of full moon over Arkham. And I see
The opal shores of seas unknown to me
Where Babel-tall, bizarre, the cities tower—
Black and basalt metropoli of myth
Athrong with ziggurat and pyramid
That scale dark skies where ebon moons are hid.
Is it a dream of Yaddath or of Ith?

Or some outré and undimensioned sphere
Beyond the cosmos? I seek not to learn
Upon what occult world those ruins rear,
Remembering those books I ought to burn.
This much I know: the cities and the shore
Were somewhere, somehow, known to me before .

XXV. DARK YUGGOTH

There lies a world beyond the seas of night,
Past the last planet, on the farthest Rim
Of curving space, where by some cosmic whim
It reels and wheels beyond the shores of light,
Lost in the howling dark. The eye of man
Can never glimpse its lone imperial place,
Deep in the blackest depths of elder space,
Nor astronomic glass may ever scan.

This is the planet that Alhazred knew,
Beyond the measured, known, and numbered nine;
Lost and alone where never sun doth shine,
Nor soft winds blow, nor skies are ever blue.
Far in the midnight deeps beyond our sight,
There the black planet rides the tides of night.

XXVI. THE SILVER KEY

Dreams hold no dread for me, for I alone
Went down the Seven Hundred Steps and passed
The Gate of Deeper Slumber, till at last
I went beyond the limits of the Known . . .
I have seen many-columned Y'ha-nthlei,
And talked with serpent-bearded Byatis,
And, flown on Night Gaunts to the last abyss,
Have glimpsed the foetid pits where Abhoth lay.

All worlds lie open to me . . . time and space
Reveal their darkest secrets to the one
Who dares the nighted realm of They Who Shun
The Light, and comes to gaze into *His* face.
What I have seen would drive you mad; yet I
Cannot go mad; I cannot even . . . *die*.

XXVII. THE PEAKS BEYOND THROK

Where ominous the mould-encumbered walls
Of riven citadels old as Mnar
Rise in their ruin, from a distant star
I wandered; now, nightmare alone recalls
Those greenly-litten vales of writhing trees
Whose scaled and snaky limbs reached for my flesh;
And those black, hellish jungles beyond Kesh
Where I with ghouls conversed by foetid seas.

And there was one that shambled from the feast,
Whining with eagerness to scan my face,
A filth-encrusted, gaunt, hound-muzzled beast
Who sought to fold me in its vile embrace.
It spake those words at which I paled and fled:
"I was your Uncle, when I lived," it said.

XXVIII. SPAWN OF THE BLACK GOAT

They ride the night-wind when the Demon Star
Over the dim horizon burns bale-red,
Come from the charnel-pits of the undead,
Nadir of nightmare, where the shoggoths are.
Now, till the light of morning-litten east
Bids them return to the unbottomed slime,
Freely they roam the darkling earth a time
And from fresh grave abominably feast.

These are they spawn that nighted pits confine,
And shouldst thou sight them in the midnight gloom,
Then art thou lost! For not the Elder Sign
That seals the great Cthulhu in his tomb,
Canst save thee from the hunger-maddened wrath
Of the Begotten of Shub-Niggurath.

XXIX. BEYOND

I have seen Yith, and Yuggoth on the Rim,
And black Carcosa in the Hyades;
And in the slimy depths of certain seas,
I have beheld the tomb where lieth Him
Who Was And Who Shall Be; and I have flown
Astride the *shantak* or the *byakhee*
Where Kadath in the Cold Waste terribly
Bears up her onyx-castled crest unknown.

I have conversed with seer and archimage
In glacier-buried, drear Commorion,
And traced the maggot-eaten parchment page
Of tomes that Tsathoggua carried from
Dim vast Cykranosh. I am no more sane,
For too much horror burns away the brain.

XXX. THE ACCURSED

Sometimes I dream that I was once a man
On some small planet in the deeps of night,
And not a mindless, mewling parasite.
And, with my brethren off Aldebaran
Or green Algol, I sometimes seem to trace
Against the dark a smiling, lovely thing . . .
I half-recall a voice that used to sing
Old lullabies . . . is it my mother's face?

Is it a vision, dream, or memory?
The chittering horde about me sweeps me on;
The half-remembered vision dims—is gone.
An ancient pain gnaws at the heart of me.
From this strange dream, this mystic cryptogram,
I wake to horror—*knowing what I am.*

-

XXXI. THE MILLION FAVORED ONES

From black Mnar, from Yuggoth on the Rim,
From those liquescent pits where shoggoths bloat,
Across the cosmic gulfs of spheres remote
—We come! We come! At the command of Him
Who is our Lord and Father. Bleak Kadath
And frozen Leng have known our awful tread;
Lost Yhe in the Pacific quailed in dread
Before our coming, and our Father's wrath . . .

And some of us were human once, and some
Have never even heard the name of Earth,
Abominations of a monstrous birth
Out of the womb of nightmare . . . When we come,
The nations kneel in fear before our step . . .
We are the Children of Nyarlathotep.



OTHER POEMS



LUNAE CUSTODIENS

When once the sunset dyes the west with red
that is the dawn of darkness, then behold . . .
marmoreal, her pallid visage peers
adown the steep and star-empowdered vault
as she hath done thrice twenty thousand years
since first her task was set by gods of old—
this night to guard the sleeping from the dead.

Unzoned, the Moon her antique vigils keep
over the couched and dreaming somnolent,
against unmemoried, malefic Night,
Mother of Mysteries, whose spectral brood
shrink from her pallid pentagrams of light,
free, save for this lunar impediment,
to prey upon their souls who dare to sleep.

Serene, remote, she watches over all
that slumber in the dim sublunar world
on this unhallowed night, accurst, arcane,
when from the coffin and the charnel pit
(the occult realm where mould and maggot reign)
the spawn of chaos wake when day has furled
his banner and the darkness spreads her pall.

Now from unplumbed abysses of the Pit,
nadirs of nightmare, all the legionry
of tomb and sepulchre are free to roam
the drear and mantic wastes, uncitied, bare,
or druid woods where horror finds a home,
or coasts which front the acherontic sea,
or shadowed vales of gloom indefinite.

By haunted hills where moonlit menhirs lean,
by stagnant moat and ivy-cumbered wall,
dark avenues of graveyard cypress, yew,
and wizard laurel, all the ghouls of dream
seek the unguarded sleeper whereunto
their psychonecrophilic hungers call
unto the Feast Unholy, that wast seen

in rune-writ tome and iron-bound grimoire
upon whose cryptic, sealed, forbidden page
were writ of old the eldrich laws of dream
in lost and ocean-drowned Poseidonis.
Only the Moon, whose silvern-paly beam
was legend to the primal archimage,
could save the dreamer from the necrophore.

Virgin of Heaven, from the hordes of Dis
who seek this night from sleeping minds to slake
their dark vampiric thirst; from the embrace
of nightmare legions spawned of the Abyss,
save us, O thou who rides the ebon tides of space . . .
pale Guardian of those who do not wake . . .
Queen of the Skies, *regina coelis!*

MERLIN, ENCHANTED

Doomwards, the shadow moves over the dreaming grass
among the watching trees, coeval with this earth,
malformed and monstrous in the druid dark.
Where boughs of Broceliande bear up bright weight
of stars
moonsilver filters through a web of leaves
in tattered tapestries of falling light:
doomwards, the shadow moves over the dreaming grass.

Among the watching trees, coeval with this earth,
sandalled in silence, shadow-robed, agrim
he broods on runic skies thick-hieroglyphed
with stars wherein his doom is legible.
He walks . . . he walks . . . Merlin among the oaks,
bemazed with magic, following her flight
among the watching trees, coeval with this earth.

Malformed and monstrous in the druid dark,
the hazels mark him and the oaks observe,
leering and peering through the seagreen gloom.
A thin wind whispers through the clotted leaves
among the menhirs on midsummer hill.
Somewhere in silence an owl calls, once; hidden
among trees
malformed and monstrous in the druid dark.

Where boughs of Broceliande bear up bright weight of stars,
one star, whirling, throbbing, hangs between the horns
of the gilt sacrificial-sickle Moon.
His beard greysilver in the heavy light
he walks . . . he walks . . . Merlin among the elms,
deep in the secret dark of the fated wood
where boughs of Broceliande bear up bright weight of stars.

Moonsilver filters through a web of leaves
on bone-bare shoulders, thin breasts, saltgreen hair,
over the undine dancing among dark trees
with gloom of oceans in her mocking eyes;
a witches' saraband through the deep green gloom,
calling him onward with a magic older than magic, as
moonsilver filters through a web of leaves.

In tattered tapestries of falling light
he climbs the crest of the pentacled, chosen hill;
under Orion's frosty eye the woman of water
binds him with seven hundred seventy spells
chanted and spun in the sacred, goblined night.
There, in the light of a star of heraldic crimson,
sorcery wove a tower of time for his prison,
in tattered tapestries of falling light.

Doomwards, the shadow moves over the dreaming grass,
into the heart of the skypointing tower, lightwoven,
augmented with moonlight, timeless, and potent
with pentacles,
standeth it tall, bordering Earth from Faërie.
Pale moonlight pulls at it, pushing a shadow from
Merlin's doom
on towards the narrow sea, falling towards the doom
of Logres:
doomwards, the shadow moves over the dreaming grass.

TO CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Upon what rare and oriental wine
Your visions fed, I cannot claim to know,
Nor from what volumned lore of spheres sublime
You built your necromantic tales, whereto
So many dreamers like myself have come
To revel in the opulence of art
That nourishes like some supernal sun
The famished dreamers whom our age doth hurt.

It is apparent you alone may spell
The hieroglyphs of parchments old as Mu
And vivify old legends to regale
This modern age that mocks its poets so.
Sing on, Atlantean, and cull new song
From ancient rimes neglected overlong.

ONCE IN FABLED GRANDEUR

Once in fabled grandeur, I
Ruled beneath an Orient sky.

And once I sat in gorgeous halls
That only memory recalls.

Another life, another land,
When I was King of Samarcand.

My kingdom now is dust and bones.
But I rule on from newer thrones.

THE NIGHT KINGS

When I stand in opal twilight
 At the passing of the day,
When the stars are dim above me
 And the world seems far away;
When the shadows slowly lengthen
 As if weary from the light
And the greys of gloaming strengthen
 To the ebony of night;

Then I hear the silence falling
 Like the sighing of the sea,
And the sound of footsteps calling
 Comes across the world to me.
Then I know the Kings are marching
 For I hear their ghostly tread
When the night's dim gloom is arching
 And the glow of day has fled.

And I see the Night Kings looming
 As they stride across the sea
With the pallid stars illuming
 Every misty shape to me:
They are clad in robes of midnight
 And the stars are in their hair
And their brows are lit with moonlight
 As I see them striding there.

At their heels a stealthy legion
 Of their shadow-subjects creep,
As they march toward that dim region
 Where the emperor is Sleep.
When I see the Night Kings striding
 In the moonlight far away
Then I know the sun is hiding
 And the dark is here to stay.

ALL HALLOWS' EVE

The goblin moon, half-hidden, half-revealed,
Leers down through ragged veils of tattered cloud
(A grinning skull wrapt in a rotting shroud),
And night lies thick as dust on hill and field.
A chill, uneasy wind moans in the eaves.
Against the yellow moon and cloudy wrack
That veils the autumn stars, trees gauntly black
Lift groaning limbs long stript of withered leaves.

A grim, ill-omened night! Within my room
Long shadows writhe and waver on the wall:
One guttering candle struggles in the gloom.
—A gust of wind—the darkness covers all—
That sound! Is it the icy lash of rain
Or bony fingers . . . *tapping* . . . on the pane?

SHARD

Within a dream I walked in woodland glens
Where moonlight fell in slanting silver rays.
A fount of crystal splashed in silent song
And milkwhite unicorns bent down to drink.

THE WIND IN THE RIGGING

I love the cry of white gulls in the morning,
The whisper of waves is like music to me.
I love the song of the wind in the rigging,
The night-wind is singing its song to the sea.

I love the creak and the boom of the canvas,
The sting of the salt as the spray is blown free.
I love the song of the wind in the rigging,
The night-wind is singing its song to the sea.

I love the glow of a full moon above us
That silvers the breast of the dark Caribbee.
I love the song of the wind in the rigging,
The night-wind is singing its song to the sea.

I love the whisper of wind in the rigging,
No sound on earth is more lovely to me.
Hark, can you hear? It's the wind in the rigging.
The night-wind is singing its song to the sea.

As the background lore for my sword and sorcery novels about the adventures of Thongor the Mighty, warrior hero of Lost Lemuria, I have invented a mythological age which preceded that of my grim-jawed barbarian monarch. Here is an heroic lay from that mythology. Diombar, the Blind Singer of Nemedis, sang it in his old age to the men of the First Kingdoms. It tells of the close of The Thousand Year War between the first of men and the last of the Dragon Kings of old Hyperborea, and of the Last Battle in that war.

DIOMBAR'S SONG OF THE LAST BATTLE

1.

With dawn we rode from Nemedis
in all her pomp and pride.
The white road thundered beneath our tread
and the white sea at our side.
The wild waves broke on the naked rocks
and returned to break once more
Where the grim black walls of the Dragon Keep
loomed on the grim black shore.

2.

The foam-maned lions of the sea
drove madly against the strand.
On a desolate stretch of wet black rock,
the heroes took their stand.
Above, against a storm-torn sky
of whirling crimson smoke,
The jagged walls of the Keep rose sheer
from the rocks where white waves broke.

3.

And Thungarth, Son of Jaidor, urged
his mount to the grim black gate
That rose above him like a cliff,
death-cold and dark as fate.
Ah, he was young as morning,
a hero to behold;
His mighty thews like ruddy bronze,
his mane like ruddy gold.

4.

The challenge was his alone to claim,
 by clan-law and blood-right,
 For the Dragon Kings had slain his sire
 in treachery by night.
 He set his war horn to his lips—
 the thunder of its cry
 Aroused the Dragon Warriors forth
 to conquer or to die.

5.

And from the ebon citadel
 the Dragon Warriors came,
 And they were mailed in adamant,
 and armed with evil flame. *
 The heroes rode against them
 and strove with sword and shield
 To fight and fall—if fall they must
 —to die, but never yield!

6.

And Khorbane fell, and proud Konnar,
 and gallant Yggrim too;
 Yet still we strove with the Dragon Kings
 and the great war trumpets blew.
 And for every hero of Phondath's breed
 who upon that black shore fell
 We sent a dozen Dragons down
 the scarlet throat of hell!

7.

From wild red dawn to wild red dawn
 we held our iron line
 And fought till the blades broke in our hands
 and the sea ran red as wine.
 With arrow, spear, and mighty mace,
 we broke the Dragon's pride,
 Thigh-deep in the roaring sea we fought,
 and crimson ran the tide.

8.

But we were armed with simple steel,
 and they with sorcery;
 And step by step they thrust us back
 into the hungry sea.
 And Thungarth saw that he must use
 that Sword the Gods had made
 Although he knew it meant his doom
 to lift that dreadful blade.

9.

As one by one his brothers fell,
 he raised the Star Sword high!
 He sang the runes to the Lords of Light
 —and thunder broke the sky!
 Red lightning flashed—drums of thunder crashed—
 a rain of fire fell
 To sweep the last of the Dragon Kings down
 to the smoking pits of hell!

10.

But the Lord of the Dragons was old and wise
 and a mighty mage was he.
 He loosed a bolt of flaming death—
 his warriors laughed to see
 The Star Sword *broke* in Thungarth's hand!
 And now what hope for Men?
 The scaly might of the hissing horde,
 They were upon him then . . .

11.

But he beat them back with the broken blade,
 there, caught in the roaring tide.
 And one by one they fell before
 young Thungarth in his pride.
 But the Dragon Lord, with a great black spear,
 he drove them forth once more,
 They closed again with Thungarth there
 while the wild waves ran with gore.

12.

Yet once again he beat them back
 with a fragment of the Sword;
 They broke and fell before him then,
 and he faced their mighty Lord.
 The great black spear was sharp and long,
 his Sword but a shard of steel;
 The Dragon Lord was fresh and strong,
 but Thungarth would not yield.

13.

He battled there with the broken blade,
half-drowned in the roaring tide;
The great black spear drank deep as it sank
in Thungarth's naked side.
But ere the Son of Jaidor fell,
or ere his strength could wane,
The Broken Sword of Nemedis
had clove the Dragon's brain.

14.

Thunder rolled in the crimson sky.
The War Maids rode the storm
To bear the soul of Thungarth home
to the Halls of Father Gorm.
The Age of the Dragon ended there
where the seas with scarlet ran:
Though the cost was high, the prize was great.
And the Age of Men began.

THE ELF-KING'S CASTLE

Within the dark enchanted wood
The elf-king's castle stood.

All moon-pale marble, snowflake-lace:
It was a holy place.

It rose up from the misty glade
And flashed amid the shade.

Slim, clustered spies and narrow wall—
A frozen waterfall.

No other mortal had come near
The place this thousand year.

One look . . . and then I turned away
But walk accursed from that day.

Go where I will, naught can I see
But that immortal symmetry.

Amid the snarling traffic—*there!*
Moon-marble, floating on the air.

Alas I ever walked that way
For I go haunted to this day.

And never shall the world of men
Seem fair to me again.

TO LORD DUNSANY

Never let the worldly-wise
Wipe the dream-dust from our eyes,
Nor let the iron gods of truth
Slay the wonder of our youth.
Hold fast against the everyday
Your tales of kingdoms far away;
Lead us through gateways of the mind
To faëry lands the dreamers find
And show us how through dreams we may
Lift anchor up and sail away—
Our galleon some golden tale,
Each printed page a straining sail.

THE FORGOTTEN

Hawk-head, the ankh has fallen from your hand.
Archer, your bright wings falter in the dust.
Huntress, you wander in a bitter land.
Warrior, your blade has rotted into rust.

No more sweet incense wreathes the morning air
Or maidens chant your legends to the flames;
Nor any mortal whispers anywhere
With awe the potent music of your names.

No more the smokes of sacrifice ascend
From hecatombs of gilt-horned oxen slain;
No more petitioners their raiment rend
To beg your favor or evade your bane.

Now are the altars ivy-overgrown,
The temples desecrate, the sibyls still.
Now are the idols only tongueless stone,
No more the living vessels of your will.

The shrines lie empty to the desert night;
The drowsy jackal by the altar nods.
Man has forgot the glory of your might—
Man has first mocked, and then forgot, the Gods.

Thigh-born, the leaves are withered on your brow.
Green-beard, your tides moan lonely on the strand.
Goat-foot, your syrinx makes bitter music now.
Hawk-head, the ankh has fallen from your hand.

GOLDEN AGE

Say not: the Golden Age has passed
And all its giants dead at last:
There are no dragons left to slay:
And wonder perished with Cathay:
For I foresee a brighter day.

A wiser Merlin may be born:
A braver Roland wind his horn:
A taller Troy in thunder fall:
A stronger Caesar conquer Gaul:
And sirens someday sweeter call.

We'll see, before this world is done,
A second Icarus seek the sun:
A more alluring Salomé dance:
A nobler Joan shall die for France:
And add new annals to Romance.

A weaker Judas shall betray
His Master come again someday:
A wilier Ulysses brave
Witch's isle and cyclops' cave:
A greater Moses part the wave.

A love-cross'd Lancelot shall fail
A-questing for a rarer Grail:
A godlier Alexander reign
To burn Persepolis again:
A truer Cid shall ride for Spain.

Aye, miracles can happen yet
Though men their myths sometimes forget.

LINES WRITTEN TO A PAINTING
BY HANNES BOK

Here where pale minarets and pylons cling
Ablaze with sunset to the scarlet peak,
Night draws across the skies her gemmy wing.

Now glides the galleon, her satin sails
Engoldening the sea, home to her rest:
Starlit, one spire the goblin moon impales.

Bright as a peacock-plume these colors gleam.
O rare the hand that made this vision live,
Kindled these fires, wove this jewelled dream!

DEATH-SONG OF CONAN THE CIMMERIAN

1.

The road was long and the road was hard
And the sky was cold and grey:
The dead white moon was a frozen shard
In the dim pale dawn of day:
But thief and harlot, king and guard—
Warrior, wizard, knave and bard—
Rode with me all the way.

2.

The wind was sharp as a whetted knife
As it blew from the wet salt seas:
The storm wind stirred to a ghostly life
The gaunt black skeletal trees:
But I drank the foaming wine of life—
Wine of plunder and lust and strife—
Down to the bitter lees.

3.

A boy, from the savage north I came
To cities of silk and sin:
With torch and steel, in blood and flame,
I won what a man may win:
Aye, gambled and won at the Devil's game—
Splendor and glory and glittering fame—
And mocked at Death's skull-grin.

4.

And there were foemen to fight and slay
And friends to love and trust:
And crowns to conquer and toss away
And lips to taste with lust:
And songs to keep black night at bay—
And wine to swill to the break of day—
What matter the end be dust?

5.

I've won my share of your gems and gold,
They crumble into clods:
I've gorged on the best that life can hold,
And Devil take the odds:
The grave is deep and the night is cold—
The world's a skull-full of stinking mould—
And I laugh at your little gods!

6.

The lean road slunk through a blasted land
Where the earth was parched and black:
But we were a merry, jesting band
Who asked no easier track:
Rogue and reaver and firebrand—
And Life rode laughing at my right hand—
And Death rode at my back.

7.

The road was dusty and harsh and long—
 Crom, but a man gets dry!—
 I'm old and weary and Death is strong
 But flesh was born to die:
Hai, Gods! But it was a merry throng—
 Rode by my side with jest and song—
 Under an empty sky.

8.

I've heard fat, cunning priestling's tell
 How damned souls writhe and moan:
 That paradise they can buy and sell
 For gold and gold alone:
 To the flames with scripture and priest as well—
 I'll stride down the scarlet throat of Hell—
 And dice for the Devil's throne!

9.

I faced Life boldly and unafraid—
 Should I flinch as Death draws near?
 Life's but a game Death and I have played
 Many a wearisome year:
Hai! to the gallant friends I made—
 Slave and swordsman and lissom maid!—
 I begrudge no foot of the road I strayed—

The road which endeth . . . *here*.

Author's Note

Like many another novelist and story-teller to the manner born, my first ambition was in the direction of poetry. As most of my colleagues eventually found to their chagrin, the direction was a false lead, beckoning into a blind labyrinth. But beginning about 1948, verses by the countless hundreds literally poured from my brain — which should have been busy soaking up Merritt and Burroughs, Howard and Brackett, Vance and Leiber, and striving to excell in the magnificent genre wherein they are dominant divinities, for in that field my true career was to be found.

It goes without saying that by far the greatest portion of these “poems” were the purest essence of vapid doggerel — puerile and derivative, stale and juiceless — mere juvenile garbage. This is not the self-drepreciating phoney modesty some writers affect, but simple honesty. In all candor, for the most part, my verse did not even strive for the sheer and delectable corn of comparable verse by such vastly pleasurable fantasy poets as Howard, Lovecraft or Smith. Had I aimed myself in that direction, I might have accomplished a certain body of decently entertaining work — as did they. But, no, I strove for unthinkable goals: to be a *real* poet.

These dreams are dead, although certain of my ambitions were not without some admirable qualities. I once tackled the epic and composed some five thousand lines of heroic pentameter on the theme of a certain Macedonian conqueror. It seemed to me then — it seems to me now — that his magnificent and unparalleled career deserved its Homer as much as Achilles his. But even my *Alexandriad* I set aside, never to take up again.

I certainly don't feel the world lost a brilliant poet when I

turned to the fantasy novel. However, not all of my poetic *oeuvre* was a thorough waste of wood-pulp. From many thousands, I have culled a rigorous few: I print them here, as much because Derleth asked me to as to enbalm something of my vanished youth. Perhaps they will give you pleasure, some of them: the ones I have chosen entertain me yet. I am particularly fond of the meaningless and yet, somehow, meaningful mysticism of "Merlin, Enchanted"; the quiet, sombre mood of "The Forgotten" pleases me; the verses to Dunsany, Smith and Bok testify to my deep love, admiration and affection for their genius; the rip-snorting gusto of the "Death-Song of Conan the Cimmerian" delights me with the vigor of its thumping meter and pleases my ear as a technical achievement, for, of course, it was written in careful imitation of Howard's own style.

The earliest of these verses is "Shard" written about 1947 when I was a boy of seventeen mooning away over books in sunny St. Petersburg, Florida; the newest is the "Death-Song of Conan the Cimmerian," written over an August 1972 weekend in a Detroit hotelroom during a science fiction convention whereat I was guest of honor. The toil of composition wearied my insomnia-afflicted brain to the point of slumber; I do hope, however, that reading these verses will not put *you* to sleep!

— LIN CARTER

Hollis, Long Island, New York

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readers, collectors and connoisseurs. But in his own right, as author of some two dozen novels and collections of short stories, he is acclaimed as one of the most gifted and popular writers of today—particularly in the genre of heroic fantasy, or “Sword and Sorcery,” as buffs of the field term their favorite reading matter. As well, in collaboration with L. Sprague de Camp, Carter has helped extend and complete the fragmentary series of “Conan” stories left unfinished at the death of Robert E. Howard.

Most recently, Lin Carter has become entranced by the Cthulhu Mythos and has turned to the crafting of exquisite miniature short stories and poems in the macabre field. Arkham House patrons will recall having seen the first few of these new Cthulhu Mythos stories in issues of *The Arkham Collector* and in the last anthology by the late August Derleth, *Dark Things*. For certain of these tales, Mr. Carter has constructed an invented Californian locale similar to Lovecraft's Arkham-Dunwich-Innsmouth milieu and Ramsey Campbell's Severn Valley. For other tales, he has experimented delightfully with episodes and narratives he pretends were “translated” from the abominable pages of such imaginary tomes as the *Book of Eibon*, the *Pnakotic Manuscripts*, and, of course, the utterly unmentionable *Necronomicon* itself. These tales have aroused the enthusiasm of Arkham House patrons, who recognize in them a subtle artistry of pure stylistic mastery by a writer who has successfully captured the flavor and mood and color of Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith than has any other writer of Carter's generation.

The present volume collects together all of the macabre verse of Lin Carter that he considers worthy of preservation. The central sonnet-cycle, of course, is an affectionate and knowing imitation of Lovecraft's own “Fungi from Yuggoth” sequence, skillfully written and cleverly connected (through its introductory notes) to the central matter of Mr. Carter's own additions to the Mythos. The additional poems, in several moods, form encomiums and memorials to Clark Ashton Smith, Lord Dunsany, Hannes Bok and Robert E. Howard.



Photo by Judy Appleton & Gloria Martin

LIN CARTER

Lin Carter and his wife share an old Greek Revival house on Long Island with seven dogs, a fascinating collection of curiosities and antiquities and artworks, a stupendous private library of fifteen thousand volumes, and an elusive resident ghost. Mr. Carter is a member of several clubs, among them The Sax Rohmer Society, The Sons of the Desert, The Hyborian Legion, The James Branch Cabell Society, The Dark Brotherhood, The Trap Door Spiders, and The Swordsmen and Sorcerers' Guild of America, Ltd., the exclusive organization of "Sword and Sorcery" writers of which Lin Carter is a Founding Father.